

Asthma in New Hampshire

Issue Brief – April 2004



WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that has been increasing in prevalence in the United States since 1980. Asthma involves swelling and inflammation of the airways, reversible airway obstruction, and muscle spasms around the airways in response to a variety of triggers. Anyone can get asthma, at any age. The main symptoms of asthma are cough, chest tightness, wheeze (a whistling, high-pitched noise coming from the chest), and shortness of breath. Asthma cannot be cured, but it can be controlled. With proper care, people who have asthma can live normal, active lives.

WHAT ARE THE TRIGGERS OF ASTHMA?

Asthma triggers—factors that may bring on or worsen asthma symptoms—include colds and infections, exposure to allergens and airway irritants, tobacco smoke (including secondhand smoke), exposure to cold air, vigorous exercise, and stress. Common allergens include pollen, mold, animal dander, feathers, house dust mites, and certain foods.

HOW IS ASTHMA MANAGED AND TREATED?

Illness and death from asthma can be largely prevented with good medical, environmental, and self-management. Good asthma management includes the avoidance of factors that trigger asthma symptoms, routine monitoring of the disease by a physician, and patient/family education. Patients with asthma should have an asthma action plan that outlines the steps to take for daily management and describes what to do when asthma worsens. The plan should be updated regularly and shared with family members, health providers, and school nurses.

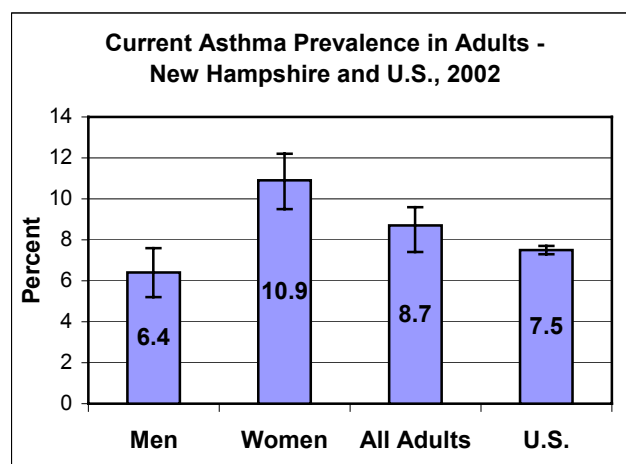
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ASTHMA IN NEW HAMPSHIRE?

Currently available data on asthma appear in the recently-published report *Asthma in New Hampshire, 1990-2002*. This Issue Brief summarizes some of the main findings of that report.

Prevalence

Asthma affects proportionally more children than adults, and more women than men. According to survey data, 13.9% of adults in New Hampshire have been told they had asthma at some time in their life. 8.7% of adults reported that they currently had asthma in 2002 (Figure 1). The prevalence of current asthma is significantly higher among adult women (10.9%) than among adult men (6.4%) in New Hampshire. In addition, approximately 17.7% of adults reported they had a child in their household who had ever been diagnosed with asthma.

FIGURE 1



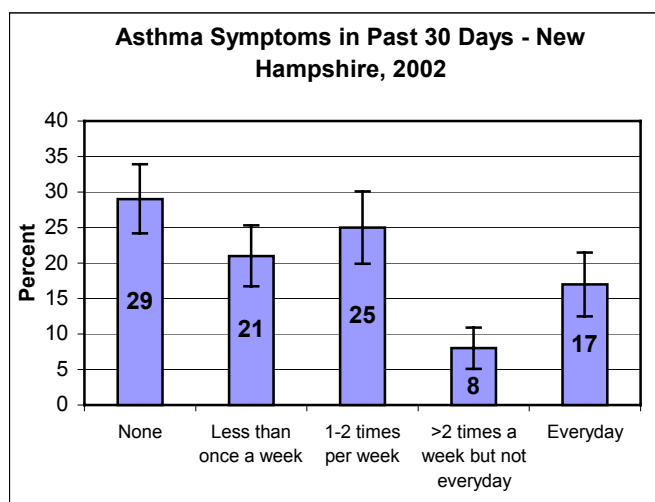
Asthma Control and Management

When asthma is managed according to established guidelines, people with asthma should experience minimal or no chronic asthma symptoms. In 2002,

only 29% of New Hampshire adults with current asthma said they were symptom-free in the past 30 days. Fifty percent of adults with asthma said they experienced symptoms at least once a week (Figure 2).

Approximately 54% of adults with asthma said they had at least one asthma attack in the past 30 days, and 19% said there were days in the past year when they were unable to work or carry out their usual activities because of asthma.

FIGURE 2



Emergency Department Visits

There were 6,096 asthma-related emergency department visits in 2001, a rate of 49.3 visits per 10,000 residents. These emergency department visits resulted in approximately 2.9 million dollars in total charges that year. Women, children less than 5 years old, and people aged 15 to 34 had the highest rates of asthma-related emergency department visits in New Hampshire.

Hospitalizations

In 2001, there were 752 asthma-related hospitalizations of New Hampshire residents, resulting in 2,412 days spent in the hospital and total charges of approximately 4.2 million dollars. The hospitalization rate for asthma in 2001 was 6.0 per 10,000 residents. Women, children less than 5 years old, and adults 65 or older had the highest rates of hospitalization for asthma in the state.

Mortality

Deaths from asthma are relatively uncommon, especially among young people. There were a total of 206 asthma-related deaths of New Hampshire residents over the period 1990-2001. Approximately 66% of all asthma deaths were among women. In 2001, there were 15 deaths from asthma in New Hampshire.

WHAT IS BEING DONE ABOUT ASTHMA IN NEW HAMPSHIRE?

The New Hampshire Asthma Control Program

Funding from the federal government helped establish the New Hampshire Asthma Control Program in October 2001. The goals of this program are to:

- Build capacity within the Office of Community and Public Health to address asthma
- Develop a system to collect information on asthma to guide efforts and monitor progress
- Establish a statewide advisory council and develop a comprehensive asthma action plan for New Hampshire
- Begin implementing the activities recommended in the action plan.

A Statewide Objective to Reduce Asthma

Healthy New Hampshire 2010 is the state's first disease prevention and health promotion agenda. It includes the following objective to address the problem of asthma in New Hampshire:

- Reduce hospitalizations for pediatric asthma (children 0 to 17 years of age) from a baseline level of 10.5 per 10,000 population in 1998 to 7.9 per 10,000 by the year 2010.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

For more information on the data presented here or to receive a copy of *Asthma in New Hampshire, 1990-2002*, contact the New Hampshire Asthma Control Program at (800) 852-3345 ext. 0855 or <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov>